


Governor Signs Marriage Equality Bill Into Law

Delaware Becomes 11th state in the country to allow same-sex couples to marry


DOVER – Joined by legislators and community advocates on the steps inside Legislative Hall, Governor Jack Markell signed legislation to allow same-sex couples to marry, making Delaware the 11th state in the country to legalize same-sex marriage. Receiving bi-partisan support, [House Bill 75](#) passed in the Senate today by a vote of 12 to 9. It had previously  passed the House of Representatives last month by a vote of 23-18.

“Today, we wrote a new chapter in our history and proved, once again, justice and equality continue to move forward in Delaware,” said Governor Markell. “In my State of the State earlier this year, I spoke about a Delaware that protects the rights of all of its citizens, no matter whom they love. By signing House Bill 75 into law, we are another step closer towards achieving that goal.”

“Today the state Senate did the right thing,” said Lt. Governor Denn. “Twenty years from now, our kids will wonder why it was ever an issue.”

The bill, introduced by Rep. Melanie George Smith (D-Bear/Newark) and Sen. David Sokola (D-Newark), along with co-prime sponsors Speaker of the House Pete Schwartzkopf (D-Rehoboth), House Majority Leader Rep. Valerie Longhurst (D-Bear), and Senate President Pro Tem Patricia Blevins (D-Elsmere), expands upon [landmark legislation](#) signed into law two years ago, in which Delaware became one of only a handful of states to allow same-sex civil unions and fully recognize same-sex relationships.

“This is about the full respect and dignity that comes with marriage,” said Sen. Sokola. “I’m pleased we have passed legislation granting equal justice under the law to loving couples in same-sex relationships.”

By signing HB75 into law, Delaware establishes civil marriage equality for all families by allowing two persons to marry regardless of their genders, to recognize same-gender marriages and substantially similar legal unions solemnized outside of Delaware as marriages, to convert existing civil unions previously solemnized in Delaware to civil marriages, and to clarify that persons in a same-gender marriage shall enjoy all the rights, benefits and protections, and shall be subject to all the same responsibilities, obligations and duties as different-gender married persons under Delaware  law.

“In Delaware, we do what is right for our citizens. We don’t wait for other states. We don’t wait for the federal government. As legislators, we act right here in Delaware for our citizens,” said Rep. Smith. “This bill is about equality and treating all couples in a loving, committed relationship with equal respect and dignity. It protects religious freedom by giving churches the freedom to choose whether to marry a same-sex couple or not.”

The law establishes procedures for the conversion of existing civil unions to marriages, and explicitly protects religious freedom. No clergyperson or minister of any religious denomination will ever be required to perform any marriage, including a same-sex marriage, that does not conform to his or her religious beliefs. It also explicitly protects the freedoms of religion and speech of all persons as guaranteed under the United States and Delaware Constitutions.

“This is an important day for Delawareans and ensuring equality for all of our citizens,” said Senator Blevins. “Granting couples – regardless of their sexual

orientation – the right to marry the person they love is another important step toward ushering in the equal treatment all Americans should enjoy.”

“It has been a long road,” said Speaker of the House, Pete Schwartzkopf (D-Rehoboth). “I have been working on this for ten years and many more have been working on equality for all Delawareans for a lot longer. It’s a great day to be in Delaware.”

The issue of same-sex marriage in Delaware – and across the country – has seen widespread support during this most recent debate. The President and Vice President of the United States voiced their support, as well as Delaware’s full federal delegation. Locally, recent polling indicated 54 percent of state residents back marriage equality. Equality Delaware, a statewide organization working to ensure and promote dignity, safety, and equality for all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Delawareans, built a broad-based coalition to advocate for the bill. The organization earned support from faith leaders such as Episcopal Bishop Wayne Wright and Dr. Donald Morton, organizations like the Delaware NAACP and the state’s four leading labor unions, and businesses like DuPont.

“Today’s vote for marriage equality makes Delaware a place where all loving couples are treated equally under the law,” Lisa Goodman, President, Equality Delaware, Inc. “I have never been prouder to be a Delawarean than I am today.”

Entitled the Civil Marriage Equality and Religious Freedom Act of 2013, it becomes effective on July 1, 2013.

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Video from the bill signing is available on [YouTube](#).

Video from a Google+ Hangout following the bill signing is also available on [YouTube](#).

**TEXT OF GOVERNOR'S STATEMENT FROM MARRIAGE EQUALITY BILL
SIGNING CEREMONY**

I know many of you here today, and many up and down our state, have waited years and decades for this day to come. I know many of you know others who had hoped for years and decades to see this day come, but who passed before their right to marry the one they loved was recognized by the state they called home. I do not intend to make you wait a day longer.

It is in moments like this that it is truly humbling to hold this office. I spoke in my Inaugural Address in January about great Delawareans who have changed history and made our state better for generations to come. Those of you who have worked tirelessly for years to make today possible, who started working to make this day possible before today was even imaginable, have joined the ranks of those great Delawareans. You have advanced the cause of liberty, equality, and dignity in our time.

It has taken us time to know and recognize what the children of gay and lesbian parents in committed relationships have long known – that the people they love and look up to, who have dedicated their love and lives to raising them, are their parents, are their family. By extending the dignity of marriage to their parents' relationships, we recognize what they know – that they and their parents are family – in terms that are unmistakable and undeniable.

Marriage equality would not have become a reality here in Delaware were it not for the extraordinary efforts of Equality Delaware, under the amazing leadership of Lisa Goodman and Mark Purpura. They are passionate advocates, consummate professionals and, most important of all, kind and decent people. They exemplify the virtues of active citizenship in a state of neighbors.

Marriage equality also would not have become a reality in

Delaware without the courageous and principled leadership of Representative Melanie George Smith, Senator David Sokola, the Pro Tem, and the Speaker.

It is my distinct honor today to sign this legislation into law – to make marriage equality the law of Delaware. Delaware should be, is and will be, a welcoming place to live, love, and raise a family for all who call our great state home.

Thank you.